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# Glimpses of Student Life

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## Glimpses of Student Life

Residents of Ames, being closely allied in many cases with growing things, are likely to welcome a spring shower as a providential aid to the new crops, gardens, and lawns, but during two or three days of May each year the prayers of students, faculty, and townspeople include a plea for fair and mild weather. For mid-May is Veishea time, a spring-time festival and open house that is typically Iowa State, and like nothing else to be found on any campus. It is Iowa State on display.

Starting with a single parade by engineering students to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, the occasion first became known as Veishea when it became an all-college affair. Its odd name was coined by Frank D. Paine '09, a former mayor of Ames, and former head of the department of general engineering, from parts of the titles of the five divisions of the College — Veterinary Medicine, Engineering, Industrial Science (as the present Division of Science was called in those days), Home Economics and Agriculture.

Although the first official celebration was not held until 1922, present day students claim that the real origin was 1910 when the "Ags" and the "Engineers" were having a discussion as to



whether St. Patrick was an "Ag" or an "Engineer." When it was decided that St. Patrick was an engineer, the engineers began celebrating the day — first with a parade, later with a ball and an open house. It was not long before both "Ags" and "Engineers" had their own festival, and the girls were producing a May Fete, too. When all of these joined together in the Veishea of 1922 Dean Curtiss led the two-mile parade astride a white horse. A musical extravaganza was added in 1923. Since then, Veishea has never missed a year, and undergraduate ingenuity is taxed regularly to produce new and sometimes startling innovations.

The real purpose of Veishea, as it ultimately evolved, became to portray the educational program of the College, and to provide entertainment typical of college life and campus activities. Undergraduates proudly billed it as "the largest student-managed festival of the nation" and built an organization that was able to put on a three-day exposition worthy of a professional group.

While collegiate rodeos, donkey baseball games, trick and fancy riding, dog shows, and other features had their vogue and faded, the solid core of Veishea remained the displays put on by students of each department of the campus, and witnessed by throngs of high school students and adults.

Other events which stood the test of time were canoe races on tiny Lake LaVerne on the campus,



the "tapping" of outstanding students for the honorary groups of Mortar Board and Cardinal Key, the crowning of the Veishea Queen, a horse show, vaudeville consisting of skits by undergraduates, a musical production termed "Stars Over Veishea," and an all-college dance. To these was added a program of spring intercollegiate athletic events, and special programs by such groups as the Players, the forestry students, debaters, and others.

But the real thrill for most spectators is still the Veishea parade which has grown through the years to include approximately eighty floats, representing untold hours of careful thought plus equally astronomical hours of labor.

It may seem strange that such a celebration should evolve from a College which in its beginning was much less given to extra-curricular activities than even the normal college of its day. Its early student body was largely from families of modest circumstances who operated farms or labored in workshops. Nothing in its philosophy tended toward anything but earnest work.

Life, as described by those who attended Iowa Agricultural College in the first two decades, was ascetic by present standards, but the old grads swear the student body never was more closely knit. The whole College dined together three times each day in the basement of Main Building. The first floor was largely devoted to classes, the



second floor to coeds, the third floor to upper-classmen, and the fourth floor was "freshman Heaven." A brief "social hour" followed the evening meal, during which boys and girls mingled together, but between the hours of 7 p.m. and 10 p.m. study was strictly enforced by a proctor.

Professor W. H. Wynn, head of the department of English literature, was a favorite of the students, and literary societies were the first organized student activities. On Friday nights everyone attended his meeting as a social and intellectual feast. Other societies gradually grew up around departmental interests, particularly the agricultural areas.

On Saturday afternoons the boys were allowed to enter Main Building by the front door instead of the back or side entrance. It was the time, also, for "campus lab" which was again the opportunity to mix discreetly with members of the opposite sex — perhaps to play croquet or tennis. One year the senior pastime was wheeling junior ladies about in wheelbarrows.

The first college paper, the *Aurora*, appeared in 1873, and was published monthly, on a rather lofty literary plane, by the four literary societies of the time. Shakespearean plays were given at Commencement, the parts being assigned by the teacher of elocution.

An early "extra-curricular" activity for coeds was the Ladies Military Company — voluntary



drill units similar to those formed at other colleges. Attired in natty flat caps, brass buttons, white belts, flowing dark skirts, and swords, they were first organized in 1878, with Carrie Chapman Catt '80 as one of the organizers. Known as companies G (for girls) and L (for ladies) they became adept at marching maneuvers. One of the long-remembered events of the 1890's was a trip made by special train to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago where companies L and G, along with the male military units, performed for Exposition visitors. The ladies' military companies were disbanded in 1897.

With the coming of President Beardshear in 1891 "college spirit" foamed high, encouraged by that likeable gentleman, and aided by new student enterprises. One of Beardshear's early duties was to settle a long-standing feud between fraternity and non-fraternity members. The first fraternity, Delta Tau Delta, was founded as Omega chapter in 1875. Two years later Pi Beta Phi sorority established its Iowa Gamma chapter on the campus. Friction arose, which included a raid on a fraternity banquet by "barbs" in 1888, and petitions were circulated for the abolition of all secret societies on campus. Members of fraternities ultimately were expelled from literary societies. In turn, fraternity and sorority recruits formed a new literary society which met strong opposition from the existing societies.



The matter finally was put in the lap of the president. Feeling that the solidarity of the College was threatened, Beardshear called a special chapel meeting and met the issue squarely by forbidding students henceforth to join fraternities. It was not until 1904, when the housing problem was made acute by the abandonment of the old dormitory system, that fraternities and sororities were re-established on the recommendation of President Storms. Since that time both have played a prominent and highly commendable part in College affairs.

Even dancing was not looked upon with favor in the beginning, and for the first decades the big social event was the junior "walk around" or "trot" which a contemporary reporter described as follows in 1891:

One Friday evening, the gentlemen of the junior class, resplendent in knee breeches, low shoes, black hats with yellow bands, yellow ties, elaborate shirt fronts, black and yellow sashes and canes tied with yellow ribbon, marched out in force to take their annual trot. After displaying their colors and arousing the envy and admiration of the other boys, they returned to the bachelors' rooms for the junior ladies, who wore black skirts, tan colored blouses, black ties, hats same as the gentlemen, and carried fans ornamented with black and yellow ribbon. They marched across the campus to President Beardshear's house, where falling into line three hearty cheers were given for him. They then sang "Don't you wish you were a tadpole?" and gave the college yell. President Beardshear, in a short speech, told them that he appreciated and was



pleased with the class enthusiasm exhibited. Upon returning, they adjourned to the senior and freshman rooms, where, after having a short social time, cake, coffee, and fruit were served. The junior gentlemen received many compliments upon the success of their trot.

The yellow and black motif possibly was an expression of the new College colors of silver, gold and black, which were adopted in 1891 but proved a bit bewildering in number and hue. The present cardinal and gold were adopted in 1899 and worn by the athletic teams which first came into being a decade before.

In 1889 the College sent six representatives to a state field day, and in 1891 a track association was formed. During the next two years baseball, football and tennis appeared on an organized basis. A student-controlled Union Athletic Association was formed in 1894 to unify these groups, and it served until the Athletic Council came into being.

It was a heady beginning for intercollegiate athletics. The Iowa Inter-Collegiate Base Ball Association was formed in 1892, composed of Drake University, Iowa College at Grinnell, the Iowa Agricultural College, and the State University of Iowa, with Cornell College added the following year. In the initial season Iowa Agricultural College was champion.

Ira Brownlee, an undergraduate athlete of distinction, captained the first football team, which



he also helped organize and coach in 1892. In 1895 Glenn S. "Pop" Warner, recently captain at Cornell University and just beginning a long and illustrious coaching career, arrived to take over coaching duties which he continued for a month or so every fall for five years before going on to his regular jobs at Georgia and later Cornell.

Pop was good, and the Iowa Agricultural College gridders went out to gain a reputation by playing some of the leading Midwestern teams. They won national recognition when they whipped Northwestern University 36-0 on their own field on September 28, 1895. The next day the *Chicago Tribune* declared:

Northwestern might as well have tried to play football with an Iowa cyclone as with the Iowa team it met yesterday. At the end of fifty minutes' play the big husky farmers from Iowa's Agricultural College had rolled up 36 points, while the 15 yard line was the nearest Northwestern got to Iowa's goal.

Ever since, Iowa State College athletic teams have been known as "The Cyclones."

When "Pop" Warner went to Carlisle in 1900 his connection with Iowa State ceased, and, under temporary coaches, football fortunes vanished, a fact which students and alumni found distasteful after their earlier moments of glory. An attempt was made to secure Warner as full-time coach, and he even indicated he would come — at some financial sacrifice — beginning with the season of



1902, since he had "always liked Ames and the boys there" and was confident that he could bring the College "to the front in athletics." The College apparently was unable to raise what must have been a fairly modest sum that Warner asked, and he went on to find his fame elsewhere.

Iowa State continued to consider from time to time the merits of a "big time" athletic program, and to experience some of the thrills and headaches that came as intercollegiate athletics assumed their present stature during the period between 1900 and 1925. In the latter year Iowa State College joined with five regional state institutions — Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma and Kansas State College — in the formation of the new Missouri Valley Intercollegiate Athletic Association, which became known as the Big Six. Colorado University joined the group in 1948, and the conference became the Big Seven. In 1957 Oklahoma State University was added, to complete the present Big Eight.

Iowa State's fortunes varied within the conference, but were generally good with the exception of football. Outside of the intercollegiate field the College built a program of intramural sports that has served as a model for other institutions.

The chief center of present student social life is the Memorial Union. Much of the informal educational program of the College also focuses there, and it is the headquarters for most outside groups



meeting on campus. The Union was launched as a memorial to the Iowa State men and women who served in the Armed Forces during World War I. Since World War II, the purpose has been changed to memorialize all Iowa State men and women who have given life or service in the Armed Forces. It is organized as a private club, financed by students, alumni staff and friends of the College.

The first units of the Memorial Union were erected in 1927 and 1928, and in spite of financial difficulties caused in part by the depression of the 1930's, the corporation has never failed to make good on its obligations. Meanwhile, five additions have been made to it to meet new demands of the student body, the faculty, and other users of the building. The most recent addition, completed in 1958, brought the total value of the building to about four million dollars.

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